

June 1, 2017

Dr. Herminia Palacio
Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Too Good for Drugs/Thrive NYC

Dear Deputy Mayor Palacio:

I hope this letter finds you well.

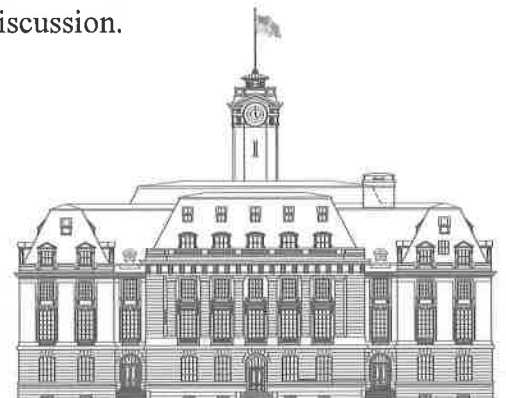
I want to thank you for your time and attention during our recent visit to City Hall. Stopping the scourge of opioid addiction is of paramount importance to me and I am committed to making sure it holds the highest priority in Staten Island Borough Hall.

I would like to take this opportunity to reinforce my belief that the Too Good for Drugs (TGFD) curriculum, as a social-emotional learning tool, and as the curriculum adopted by OASAS as the instructional tool throughout NYS, is a natural addendum to Thrive NYC goals. TGFD directly impacts the first two guiding pillars of Thrive NYC: Change the Culture and Act Early.

On page 41 of Thrive NYC: A Roadmap for Mental Health for All, under the Change the Culture pillar, is the following passage:

We are also investing in an effort to improve the climate in our schools, so all of our students feel comfortable speaking honestly with their teachers and counselors about any issue that might hinder not just their intellectual development, but also their emotional development. This will improve academic achievement and, ultimately, graduation rates.

Too Good for Drugs breaks down barriers between teachers and students, and creates a safe space in the classroom to discuss substance abuse and/or related issues, with a built in family-component which extends the discussion into the home . TGFD also works to remove the stigma of substance abuse, allowing educators to reach students who face related issues, but who don't have anyone they are comfortable talking to. But perhaps most importantly, TGFD changes the conversation about substance abuse, encouraging open and honest discussion.



It is much deeper than a finger-wagging “Don’t Do Drugs” program because it delves into the issues underlying addiction. Additionally, the data shows that the program has been most impactful on our highest at-risk students

Another area of the Change the Culture pillar is to Improve School Climate (page 45). At the core of that approach is a reform of the procedure to address behavioral issues and a move toward a more restorative approach. TGFD changes the dynamic of the relationship between a student and a teacher by fostering trust and collaboration. The program reinforces to the student that the teacher is a partner - not a disciplinarian. It also gives the teacher a more personalized perspective of the issues his/her students face, which will, in turn, encourage restorative rather than punitive approaches to substance abuse matters that may arise.

The second pillar of Thrive NYC is Act Early. In the section Social-Emotional Learning in Early Care and Education, it is stated that:

By building adults’ capacity to support children’s social and emotional development early on, children will be better equipped to handle various circumstances and seize opportunities throughout their lives...

Children will get more support to be aware of and comfortable with their own emotions, including how to self-regulate and how to adapt to new situations.

Since the TGFD curriculum is geared to begin in Kindergarten, I believe it will be a key supplement of Thrive NYC’s Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) expansion. It will be especially important by sustaining, reinforcing, and building upon the gains achieved by the implementation of SEL in early childhood education—and critical in classrooms with students who have not benefited from early childhood education.

Most importantly, TGFD is modeled exactly after Social-Emotional Learning. It focuses on the “development of personal and interpersonal skills to resist internal and external pressures to use drugs.” As well, it teaches key skills such as “goal setting, decision making, bonding with pro-social others, identifying and managing emotions, and communicating effectively.” That is the essence of SEL.

In fact, in the TGFD K-5 Logic Model, under the heading of Strategies, the first item in the curriculum is:

Develops personal and interpersonal skills to develop social emotional competency and resist peer and media influences.



I hope you will take these factors into consideration as we explore expanding the TGFD program in our Staten Island schools; to me, Too Good for Drugs and Thrive NYC are natural partners. I hope you will agree.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Sincerely,



James S. Oddo
President, Borough of Staten Island

Cc: Mayor Bill de Blasio

